

**Taylor, Mary N. 2021. *Movement of the People: Hungarian Folk Dance, Populism, and Citizenship*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 316 pp. Illus.**

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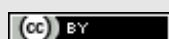
Although Mary Taylor's experiences with and documentation of *tánc ház*<sup>2</sup> serves as the ethnographic center of *Movement of the People: Hungarian Folk Dance, Populism, and Citizenship*, her work should be understood as a much broader exploration of the intricate and shifting relationships between political, economic, social, and cultural spheres in Hungary. Her study is a diligently researched and sweeping, an expansive interrogation of how cultural forms and practices can be inextricably linked with processes of building a nation-state. Her deep dive exploring this in the Hungarian context is timely given the current political environment there. Indeed, her work seems designed to contextualize present-day circumstances, though not as a simple cause-and-effect scenario, but rather as a nuanced constellation of historical precedents. Among the theoretical lenses she uses for this exploration are concepts of "frameworks of sense"; cultivation and the dichotomies of inner/spiritual and outer/material spheres; collective memory; and associative spaces.

Taylor's book is laid out clearly enough in essentially chronological order. She begins with an introduction called "The Aesthetic Nation," in which she lays out many of the key concepts that will be explained in greater detail later. For example, much of "The Aesthetic Nation" focuses on Taylor's concept of "civil society", which she defines as "a space of association between the family and the state while also using the term as a heuristic for the 'decisive locus of operation of modern power' [reference from anthropologist David Scott]." (8) She introduces notions of cultivation, citizenship, and nationalism, as well as brief intellectual overviews of these concepts. She also states her research context, indicating that she is not examining *tánc ház* as a movement, as many other scholars have done, but rather as "an element in a process of state formation spanning distinguishable political economic regimes." (15) Chapter One is a necessary starting point to explore the early, shifting senses of national identity and tools of identity formation in Hungary, from the sentiment of "national awakening" before the 1848 revolution to the early Horthy years in the early 1930s. Taylor demonstrates that the drastic economic and political changes during this time were accompanied by a cultural and institutional framework that served to bolster Hungarianness in a symbolic way early on, but then later by the systematic and scientific tools with which to explore questions of national identity, particularly with the emerging discipline of ethnography and with the early revival ethos

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<sup>2</sup> Literally "dance house," *tánc ház* is a Hungarian term for a folk dance event associated with a revival of traditional culture that began in the 1970s in Budapest. As Taylor explains on p. 2 and throughout her book, *tánc ház* was a term borrowed from a Transylvanian village (Szék) where the term referred to the social event itself as well as the location that housed the event.



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of the Pearly Bouquet Movement, an amateur folk dance movement staged by villagers and primarily for touristic purposes or for national holidays.

Chapter Two focuses squarely on the so-called "*népi mozgalom*" (populist<sup>3</sup> movement) of the interwar period, providing a brief overview of *népi* writers and exploring the implications in the political sphere. Here, Taylor elaborates one of the book's key theoretical frames—the notion of cultivation (i.e., education in a broad sense, Hungarian *művelődés*)—or as Taylor would translate this in the context of her research, "civic cultivation" (51). She explores this in response to the question "What Kind of Nation?", and in attempting to provide an answer she carefully probes the nuances of language, which becomes a thoughtful reflection of the underlying concepts, a crucial strength of this chapter.

Following on the heels of the discussion of "civic cultivation," Chapter Three introduces the physical infrastructure—the places and spaces—where cultivation could happen during socialist rule: "houses of culture" and clubs. Though perhaps "official" in name and managed from the top down under socialist rule, Taylor suggests there was more autonomy in how houses of culture and clubs were run, with less centralized oversight than one might assume under socialist rule, especially during the late socialist period. This reveals an underlying tension in how cultural management happened in the pursuit of civic cultivation. Taylor gives special attention to youth movements during this time (particularly the Beat movement, though not explored in great detail), and also to popular mass media, most notably the TV shows *Ki Mit Tud?* (Who Knows What?) and *Repülj Páva* (Fly, Peacock).

Chapter Four, "The *Táncház* Revolution," describes the origins, institutional framework, and innovative aspects of the *táncház* revival movement. Taylor makes the claim, and scholars/participants that she interviewed agree, that *táncház* could only have emerged at this juncture, having necessarily been preceded by a robust musical pedagogy (thanks to Zoltán Kodály), familiarity with authentic music and dance forms via village visits and ethnographic discovery, and an institutional framework flexible enough to have centralized support and yet also a sense of cocreation in the cultivation of national identity, which she refers to as a kind of "negotiation" (139). The relationship between the Hungarian nation-state and ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania, as research and researchers and revivalists looked to an idealized agrarian cultural life as a "pure source," of national identity is crucial. As this relationship deepened, Taylor claims, it brought into sharper relief notions of boundaries between ethnic identities. Taylor addresses the innovations that *táncház* fostered as well, especially the participatory aspect.

Language becomes the focus of Chapter Five, as Taylor explores the community-building potential of *táncház* through the production of collective memory. She argues here that a particular "alternative framework of sense" (referencing sociologist Alberto Melucci) is created in the *táncház* environment, which can spur collective action. As she discusses the notion of "folk dance as mother tongue" and the threads of this concept since the time of Kodály, Taylor problematizes the assertions of authenticity made by revivalists and raises some good, basic points about the dynamic nature of tradition. She goes on to examine the conversational language

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<sup>3</sup> Taylor indicates that "populist" is a conventional way of translating the term *népi*, (52) and so populist has been used here. Though *népi* is in fact more commonly translated as "folk" or "people's," "populism" is a term that has evolved, and its interpretation in more recent contexts are explored in later chapters.

and informal discourse that happens in a *táncház* context and how politics can thus be brought into the "associative space."

Chapter Six reaches back a bit to explore the economic and political shifts from 1956 to early in the regime change that unfolded after 1989, and *táncház*'s more active connections to these shifts. She locates two "moments of danger": the ethnic Hungarian protests of 1988 in Transylvania, and the "stolen regime change" rhetoric surrounding the 2022 election. Both reveal a rise in ethnonationalist rhetoric and sentiment, and Taylor demonstrates how the shifting sense of what *népi* stood for implicated *táncház* through a kind of "ethnicization of culture" (205). Importantly, Taylor also makes distinctions here between the different kinds of political, social, and cultural citizenship being advocated for via the interwar *népi* activists and *táncház*-goers. In Chapter Seven, Taylor reflects on the heritagization "regime," which she defines as a practice that delineates culture as property with particular and rightful owners (217). Implicated is the process of how UNESCO makes world heritage designations, but also the tourism industry writ large and more general practices and funding that support formal place-based cultural recognition. Taylor focuses on Hungary's national referendum in 2004 (which essentially dealt with granting citizenship to ethnic Hungarians in neighboring nations) and the response of *táncház*-goers to demonstrate the now active political involvement of the cultural sphere. Her conclusion reflects on developments that have happened since her fieldwork ended around 2006/7, relying instead on writings of critical Hungarian, East European, and Balkan scholars and their critiques of the conditions that allow ethnonationalism to flourish as it is today. Regarding the ways in which cultural forms have developed in Hungary, she sees the current situation as a tension between *táncház*'s increasing use in the political sphere as a kind of ethnonationalist point of pride, while at the same time *táncház* as a heritage practice is valorized on the international stage (via its UNESCO designation as a "Good Safeguarding Practice" and its spotlight at the 2012 Smithsonian Folklife Festival).

Overall, the book is a must read for anybody interested in Hungarian studies or cultural studies more broadly. To my knowledge, no English-language scholarly source takes this sort of ambitious and expansive view of Hungarian dance in such a carefully considered and nuanced context. Its main strength is the sweeping view it takes in understanding highly complex interactions between politics, economics, social life, and culture in the name of building a nation-state. Taylor would be the first to claim she is an outsider, yet it is clear that years of ethnographic research ground her book. In its attempts to tackle such intricate relationships in a comprehensive way, one critique centers around concepts or ideas that need more explanation. (I mention them here because Taylor herself goes to great lengths to dissect language and terminology.) For example, the concept of "associative space" needs more clarity. When first introduced in "The Aesthetic Nation" (see earlier), it is suggested that "associational life" might refer to institutions and organizations and the space they carve out in civil society (8). At other times, referenced throughout the book, it seems to refer to intangible or ephemeral linkages that are happening on a more conceptual level; i.e., "associative sphere" (67); "associative activities" (141); "associative environment" (148); the social aspects of "associational life" (149). Perhaps it means both. The ambiguity of this concept, and of the intellectual or disciplinary threads that constitute it, particularly in the absence of a clear definition of how Taylor herself defines it, is problematic, as the concept seems to be so all-encompassing as to be rendered almost meaningless.

Finally, as I read this work, I wondered about the role of nostalgia. Taylor mentions nostalgia only in the contexts of the rapid urbanization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries and of the interwar *népi* movement (45, 77, 78), and cautions against its use for fear that it “glosses over” (45) real concerns about oppressive economic conditions. More current research on nostalgia may provide additional understanding. An excellent place to start might be the 2019 special issue of the journal *Humanities* titled *Contemporary Nostalgia* (Salmose, Niklas. 2019. *Contemporary Nostalgia*. MDPI – Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute). In his insightful introduction to the issue, Salmose observes that nostalgia “appears increasingly to be a modality of its own with major potential for understanding how our now is shaped by our then” (10). To understand the role of nostalgia in the political context, the 2022 article by New York University sociologists Bart Bonikowski and Oscar Stuhler, “Reclaiming the Past to Transcend the Present: Nostalgic Appeals in U.S. Presidential Elections” (*Sociology Forum*, 37: 1263–1293) might shed more light on the modern historical moment. And because collective memory is an important theoretical lens of Taylor’s, the 2010 editorial in *Memory Studies*, “Nostalgia and the Shapes of History” by Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies (3[3] 181–186), which problematizes nostalgia and asks us to think of nostalgia through a very critical lens, might well align with Taylor’s approach.